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CONSIDERING UBUNTU FOR SATIRICAL (ONLINE) COMMUNICATION: COMMENTS ON *JESUS IS A SHANGAAN*

ABSTRACT

Satire is a genre of communication that enables people to say the unspeakable, often enabling powerful norms and powerful people to be questioned and challenged. As such, satire is a powerful weapon with which society may strike at and against oppression and other problematic orders. However, satire may also be misused to misrepresent and demean others. Meanwhile, in online encounters where people are not subject to a wide gamut of social controls and moral obligations are weakened by anonymity, people are liable to use satire in ways that are experienced by others as offensive and hurtful. This is arguably pointedly problematic in contexts where historical developments have marginalised and tribally positioned people to be the butt of jokes. This article examines these and related concerns in the light of the animated video Jesus is a Shangaan to argue that it is worthwhile to present a scholarly account of what the African moral philosophy of Ubuntu may say about how people should satirise. The conclusion is that there is a need for scholars to elaborate more systematically and adequately what Ubuntu requires of satirical communication – how African excellence can be understood when communication is satirical.

Keywords: Ubuntu; satire; African communication; Shangaan; online communication

INTRODUCTION

Satire is a genre of artistic or theatrical production. It identifies and then mocks and besmirches generalised characteristics which are associated with its targets. Ideally it is presented with a view to reflect how the vices identified in its targets could be improved. However, it is not satire when dramatic irony is used to merely lampoon those at whom the harsh humour of satire is directed.

Satirists use a wide variety of techniques as they separate themselves from the society to which they belong (Schlegel 2005: 5) in order to be able to most powerfully challenge aspects of that society that they believe should be destroyed or overcome. However, there is wide agreement that satire is an offensive art which caricatures and parodies the enemy in ways (Freud 1995)

that fundamentally distort and exaggerate, usually with malice that is often justified and made lighter because it also intends to be humorous (Freedman 2009; Schlegel 2005). Wit is an important tool in the satirist's arsenal as it 1) ridicules the enemy in ways that would otherwise be restricted, while 2) it makes the whole experience pleasurable in ways that also would have been inaccessible, and 3) presents an idea as more attractive and pleasurable than more deliberative approaches would likely allow (Freud 1995: 745). Because of its ability to enable people to say the unspeakable, satirical wit very usefully enables people to speak up against attempts to limit free speech (Freedman 2009) or generally to express opposition to authoritarian dominance (Freud 1995: 746-751).

Given the above, this article presents a case for further reflections on *how* satirical representations of "tribal" *should* appear online with its practice of fragmenting communities and directing violent speech against others. The authors are concerned that satire may appear to go against widely recognised African values, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1997: 29) thinks should prioritise maintaining harmonious and friendly community relations which maintain and maximise social welfare:

> Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts, that undermines this sought-after good, is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me. It gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.

This view of African moral values which Tutu expresses is fundamental to how Metz (2007: 338) derives his view on what Ubuntu teaches: "An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on goodwill; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill will". Yet in contemporary society harmony cannot be taken for granted. People in online discursive practices tend to express more extreme views than would otherwise be the case in offline worlds (Hargrave & Livingstone 2009; Lewis 2011). As such online discursive practices test how communities and individuals establish viable relations of solidarity and shared identity.

The authors therefore think it is valuable to put forward tentative thoughts on how Ubuntu may guide online satire in contemporary South Africa. To this end, this article casts a critical gaze at an online video titled *Jesus is a Shangaan* (2012) and purposively selects online comments from a YouTube site (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bekg59wQVgE) on which the video is featured.

OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Online communication, satire, tribalism and the representation of Africans are significant concepts which are difficult to weave together. We are content to render these concepts in a rather aleatory manner that nevertheless parsimoniously allows us to critically discuss how:

■   Africans are represented in tribalistic ways;

- Shangaan people in particular are tribalised and hence often made the butt of tribal jokes; and
- online communication often frees people to express themselves in extreme ways that are conducive to tribalising others.

Representing Africans by tribalising identities

Dominant ways of representing Africans by tribalising their identities are arguably the products of debates and moral discourses within which late eighteenth-century Europeans contested how to relate "European and Other, savagery and civilization, free labour and servitude, man and commodity" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2010) in a context in which the ideologies of race and tribalism were being invented (Mudimbe 1988). Some Afrocentrists say that the West tragically destroyed pristine African tribal practices, progenies, ontogenies or histories that were characterised by harmony (Appiah 2010). The above views suggest that one can present Africans as though their contemporary discourses about tribes and about tribalism were created by Westerners, as though Africans have no choice and agency in the tribal discourses in which they are implicated and involved (Vail 1989; Mafeje 1971). But as this article will indicate, with reference to online discussions concerning *Jesus is a Shangaan*, Africans have a role in how tribalism is imagined and acted out.

For the purpose of this article it is not necessary to split hairs about the portions of blame or responsibility for tribalism that should fall on colonialism, apartheid or on various communities of Africans. What matters here is that the claim that Africans are tribalistic peoples is fundamental to thinking of Africans as tribal peoples among whom tribalism is to be expected (Vail 1989: 3).

To understand tribalism it is important to define the word "tribe". In this article the word "tribe" describes:

> a whole society, with a high degree of self-sufficiency at a near subsistence level, based on relatively simple technology without writing or literature, politically autonomous and with its own distinct language, culture and sense of identity, tribal religion being also coterminous with tribal society (Southall 2010: 83).

Under the influence of social constructionists since the 1970s it has been widely seen as politically incorrect to speak of tribes. It has become common to substitute the word "tribe" with the word "ethnicity", which appears to be marked with fewer pejorative connotations. While essentialist views of ethnicity are similar to common views regarding "the tribe" in that they emphasise primordial, ancestral, cultural and language bonds, social constructionists are keen to show that ethnicity does not involve suprahistorical and quasi-natural ties, but that it merely reflects social identities which are chosen, formed and constructed in historical-political circumstances (Lentz 1995: 376). Aside from fairly specific genetic markers that relate to proneness to certain diseases and ailments, there are, outside of states, hardly any societies today that have the kinds of autonomy or linguistic unity, and there are hardly any that, for example, have no people who are literate. In short, there are hardly any societies today that answer to the requisite stipulations and can be described as tribal or ethnic. To the extent

that communities that match the combination of these elements cannot be found, it is illusory to speak of tribes as though they exist. Those who insist on dragging imagined or possible historical notions of such communities into lived contexts are fairly described as practising tribalism (Southall 2010: 84).

Tribalising the Shangaan and making them the butt of jokes

The Shangaan are über-tribalised; they occupy a distinct and particular misanthropic space in the pantheon of apartheid prejudice. They are tribalised as people who fall at the bottom of the hateful ladder of humanity that apartheid construed, enacted and institutionalised with consequences for how many live today.

Commenting on how hordes of xenophobic South Africans ran through Ramaphosa informal settlement chanting "Kill the Shangaan!", Britten (2008) recalls that she had earlier recognised that in her book *The Art of the South African Insult*:

> [t]o call a non-Shangaan a Shangaan [in South Africa] is considered a grave insult, because Shangaans are viewed as country bumpkins, if not actually subhuman. A substandard type of *wors* in the townships is known as Shangaan *wors*. Pedi people have bad body odour. Xhosas are ambitious, cunning and tend to look out for each other; hence the Xhosa Nostra theory, also known as the iLuminati. Zulus are dumb but strong and brave — most security guards are Zulu — and rely too much on Indians. Sothos are lazy; probe far enough into the family history of most criminals and you'll find a Sotho. And you won't get far in Durban if you're a Pondo.

Britten (2008) rues the fact that in post-apartheid South Africa, tribal insults attached to the tribalisation of the Shangaan are still thrown around in ways that irrationally deny shared experience and shared humanity to such an extent that they mark who gets to live and who dies. The point is that there is palpable need to think carefully about how the Shangaan are made the butt of jokes.

In many an offensive joke, as Fanon (1986: 84-85) could say, the Shangaan body is often, in a tribalistic manner, made into a horrid subject for objective examination, for discovery of blackness and ethnic characteristics in ways that so thoroughly thematise and dislocate individuals that they are overdetermined to *not* exist as persons in constructive community relations. Nearly ten years after the formal end of apartheid, well-known comedian Desmond Dube – on the popular show *Dube on Monday* (2003) – spoke of Shangaan people being so ugly that even baboons look better than them. He seemingly did not immediately see anything wrong with his statement. But after defending his "joke" for almost two weeks, he succumbed to pressure from Shangaans who had lodged a complaint to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). He made a public apology in the form of a voiceover recording at the end of his show while the credits were running. This apology was not welcomed by some as they felt that it was not sincere. According to Hlatshwayo (2003), the XiTsonga language board chairperson Mandla Mathebula also rejected Dube's apology, based on the fact that "[Dube] was in front of the camera – clear and bold when he called [Shangaans] baboons", and he was hiding when he issued an apology.

The next section overviews literature on how online communication exaggerates and increases the tendency for some to use more extreme forms of communication that can harm others.

Online communication

In richly mediated interpersonal communication encounters, individuals have much that demands that they attend to demands of the other. One could speculate that as encounters become progressively more mass-mediated, this richness is denuded, so that television and newspapers, for example, appear to have to find sensational content in order to gain audience attention. Online media have enabled richer interactions on what have been dubbed social media, yet the tendency of social media interactions towards the sensational and provocative may indicate that users may be actively attempting to compensate for the inability to more fully engage with others that the richer interpersonal encounter still embodies. A well-known tendency in online communication is that significant numbers of people tend to resort to ethnic type-casting, using more and more extreme forms of expressions to describe others (Hargrave & Livingstone 2009: 162-170). Turkle (2011: 280) partly explains why this happens when observing that in online communication:

> …we easily find 'company' but are exhausted by the pressures of performance. We enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other's full attention. We can have instant audiences but flatten out what we say to each other in new reductive genres of abbreviation.

Online communication is pressured to be meaningful, suggesting that those who engage in it are aware that "there is something missing in it". The compensation is that the cyber-sphere tends to enable people to produce a wider range of viewpoints that express more diverse personae than is the case in the off-line world of face-to-face interaction with its greater sociality and greater social pressures which limit freedom of expression.

The wide range of responses to *Jesus is a Shangaan*, often evidently using avatars to enable them to express themselves with fewer strictures, illustrates this. To be sure, freeing people to challenge figures of authority is often extremely useful because it limits abuse of power. However, it is to be critiqued that people sometimes use their freedom of expression to make the most marginal and weak the targets of offensive jokes.

The next section describes the online satirical video *Jesus is a Shangaan* and discusses often strident online reactions, which can in many cases be read as focusing on ideas about how Shangaan people are made the butt of tribal jokes.

JESUS IS A SHANGAAN

An immediate problem that arises for presenting a scholarly reflection on tribal identities and representations is that there is such a proliferation of commonly held ideas concerning tribal identities and representations that this fact alone threatens to make discussions so broad that they barely touch on anything. The authors will attempt

to overcome this problem by focusing on a specific instance in which tribal identities and representations have meanings that can be imaginatively grasped vividly enough for us to be able to appeal to intuitions of the good and reasonable that the proverbial "common woman or man" can be expected to show.

Jesus is a Shangaan (Mducomics 2012a) is part of the Izikhokho series of online animation productions created by Mdu Comics. It starts off with a Zulu-speaking male who is ensconced in his hospital bed. He is telling his friend that he has hurt his toe. His doctor comes in and viewers then find out that the injured man is named Jesus. The doctor informs Jesus that his DNA does not match that of God and the doctor further tells Jesus that there is no easy way to tell Jesus the terrible news – that *Jesus is a Shangaan*. In the next scene, while walking on the street, Jesus speaks to himself saying that people will no longer take him seriously. If he does the "second coming", people will say "the Shangaan" has returned. Jesus then buys four bags of oranges, uses the sacks to scrub off his "Shangaan-ness" and states that he feels better after the bath. As he talks to himself in Zulu, he realises that he pronounces his "s" exactly like a Shangaan and laments to himself – with face in hands and a voice of disappointment – "I truly am a Shangaan". The animation ends with Jesus writing a suicide note, wanting to die because he does not want to live as a Shangaan.

When Mdu Ntuli, the animator, first released the video on Twitter in May 2012, he wrote: "Jesus is a Shangaan [not italicised in original] is a new Izikhokho cartoon! I'd like to apologise to Shangaan people in advance. Enjoy" (Mducomics 2012b). After a woman lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission, Ntuli said the cartoon "is purely fictional. Every nationality has a joke on each other and that's just how it is. For me, it is just ridiculous for any Tsonga [Shangaan] person to take this personally" (Chauke 2012). As far as can be determined, to date, he has never issued any sort of apology for the video.

What is disturbing for the authors is not so much that Ntuli appears to think that it is important for people to, in Olivier's (2015) language, "get a life" and joke about themselves, but rather that he appears to give little relevance to black, racialised experiences of being tribalised. In other words, he appears to trivialise the everyday black problem of having to constantly seek ways to rise above being the fiction of a racialised and tribalised being, of being "[a] hoax… better to laugh at?" (Fanon 1986: 87). However, the authors are accusing Ntuli of failing to tell his joke well and of failing to locate it well within historical, cultural and economic, and other material conditions that matter. The authors are arguing not for denying space for jokers who see that there is satire to be expressed about the socially constructed mess that is racism and tribalism, but for saying that such satire gains strength and depth when it is located at the crux of how history, culture, and economic and material arrangements meet and interact to make a joke of people.

Among the online comments analysed for this article, C1 (commenters are to remain anonymous) said the following:

> Black people! Our ignorance is consuming us. It's a cancer. READ A GOD DAMN BOOK! Were we barbaric and cannibalistic animals or lesser human beings before

we knew about Religion (which was brought by colonialists to Africa)?! ... I don't think so... Stop being sheep to outdated western 'prescriptions' for Africa, which were meant to keep you docile and obedient while the colonialists loot the land and [expletive deleted] up our communities! READ and Question even your Bible and Koran!

C1 suggests tribalism is a disease that attacks the body. Such metaphorical use of disease has been investigated by Sontag (1978), first in *Illness as metaphor* and later in *Aids and its metaphors* (1989). Sontag suggests that such usages of disease as metaphor suppose that disease is the work of a foreign agent who enters and attacks the body – even when an outside agent is not at work. Camus' (1947) *The plague* is a brilliant existential narrative metaphor of colonialism – presented as the story of a plague that enters from outside and mysteriously afflicts a community that must find ways to re-establish health and control (O'Brien 1970). Specifically this comment accuses some Africans of failing to have the education and concomitant critical consciousness to challenge and overcome Western practices of othering Africans. C1 also insinuates that, notwithstanding the vast variety of histories and contexts in which we find ourselves, as stated more than five decades ago by Sartre (1963: 10), for many Africans key notions of "differences are born of colonial history, in other words of oppression". C1's view reminds us that Mafeje, for example, argues that in many African languages even the word "tribe" did not even exist until:

> [T]he colonial authorities helped to create the things called 'tribes', in the sense of political communities; this process coincided with and was helped along by the anthropologists' preoccupation with 'tribes'. This provided the material as well as the ideological base of what is now called 'tribalism'. Is it surprising then that the modern African, who is a product of colonialism, speaks the same language? (Mafeje 1971: 254).

The language of tribalism is a colonial language that expresses a colonial culture informed by economic and political realities that underpin societies (Cabral 1973: 41). Tendencies towards self-hatred and black-on-black violence are structurally encouraged by apartheid practices and logics of extreme exploitation and segregation (More 2008: 62). Colonial and apartheid regimes were adept at exploiting these experiences using divide-and-rule tactics which further encouraged tendencies towards black-on-black hatred, denigration, jealousy and violence subsumed in tribalist expressions (Fanon 1963: 52).

To understand the anger with which *Jesus is a Shangaan* was received by some, one could perhaps attempt an archaeology of the knowledge and power relations by which colonial, apartheid and tribal relations are constructed and sustained in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. Such an analysis may dwell on the significance of the satirist electing to give us the moment of denouement as one in which a Shangaan man discovers that his belief that he is a messianic figure is shattered by Western medical science data which reveals that he has no genetic relations with the biblical Jesus. It may be recalled that, as Mudimbe's (1988: 33) writings on the invention of Africa profess, Western "civilizing" or Christianising discourses functioned as ideological explanations and pragmatic justifications for inventing, exploiting and conquering an

Africa that was accordingly presented as "beastly" and "barbaric". The tribalisation of Africa is a project that is deeply intertwined and implicated in racist, colonial and apartheid logics. In this context, anger and violence appear as forms of the naked truths of decolonialisation that Fanon (1963: 37) thinks evoke "searing bullets and bloodstained knives". C2 simply says: "A guaranteed R15 000 cash for anyone who can kill this cartoonist".

The peculiar colonial language of tribes enables colonialism and apartheid to produce "the other" that exists as a form that cannot speak (Spivak 1998: 271-313) and that cannot be known except as a "being who is not what is Western" (Said 1995; Mudimbe 1988; Mbembe 1992). YouTube commentators who commented on *Jesus is a Shangaan* did not explicitly comment on this. However, C3, below, can be read as founded on the understanding that all people are equal – which fundamentally challenges colonial and apartheid logics. C3 says:

> I honestly don't think Jesus minds being Shangaan (sic) at all. The Jesus that I know, who is also the King of the Universe, always takes up a role so low that He is accessible to everyone and anyone. So Yes, Jesus would gladly be a Shangaan and not only that … the poorest Shangaan you can ever imagine (If being Shangaan is something of low esteem, that is).

In the authors' view, C3 challenges the idea that some people are superior to others – which functions as the basis for colonial and apartheid "divide and rule" practices. Fanon (1963: 52) speaks of colonial and apartheid orders functioning by dividing the world into compartments so that "apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world". In making the theological claim that Jesus could as well be Shangaan, C3 is perhaps indicating that all people are made equal and that the duty of all people should be to undermine the system of regional, economic and social compartmentalisation by which colonialism and apartheid misanthropically separate and rank people.

Here, the important point must not be lost: Western colonialism is a narcissistic system that narcotically denies the existence of others even as it denies and "others" them (McLuhan 1994: 45). This is not to deny that colonised and tribalised peoples have agency. Indeed, they act with consequences that are fundamental to how the tribe fixes contestations in ways that deny the worth of the interacting individuals whose interactions give texture, sense and meaning to enactments of community.

Contestations over identity are substances of the communication by which individuals and groups describe themselves. Colonial practices distort these using "divide and rule" strategies to conjure up meanings that simultaneously limit the power and authority of indigenous scripts and knowledge regarding free, cooperative co-existence and participatory engagement (Wa Thiong'o 1981). The point is that under colonial and apartheid rule, language was used to replace indigenous knowledge and value systems with mores and norms that fix into place the "modern tribe".

The tribe that colonialism and apartheid invented claims to be traditional. But it is merely traditional in the attenuated sense of what Ranger (2010) calls an invented tradition. For the apartheid government and its operatives, emphasis on the purported

"primitive" aspects of black African groups, demonstrated by the rural squalor of many of the Bantustans, illustrated black "traditional" lifestyles. This served to legitimise the exclusion of blacks from mainstream urban society which was increasingly white and prosperous. In the chain of beings that apartheid deemed to be on separate paths of development, some black people were presented as more barbaric than others (Hayward 2007). In South Africa, the othering of blacks that talk of invented traditional tribes permitted and legitimated the removal of blacks from their land and it justified their (re)assignment to what were called Homelands or Bantustans, based on purported tribal affiliations. Today the invented traditional tribe is best seen in the remnants of the apartheid enacted Bantustans. In artistic expression, one could say that the tribe exists in South Africa today as a museum or garden culture. Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) give a scholarly and systematic account that expounds this point. For the purpose of this article the point is simply to say that the contemporary tribe is an illusion composed of categorisations and scenarios that are invented, often *in the name of the people, but not for the people*.

In South Africa, uncritical and uncaring usage of tribalising representations are arguably perpetuating the legacy of apartheid and its potentials for conflict and violence. This potential has been intermittently seen in the deadly xenophobic violence that has plagued the country since 2008 (Nyamnjoh 2010).

The psychological effects of apartheid's structural violence continue to be felt today, even as the country battles to rid itself of the remnants of apartheid planning and practices (Fassin 2007; Commission 2010). For many, the work of getting out of structurally violent class and race positions involves overcoming the legacies and logics of apartheid. Psychologically, colonial rule and apartheid denigrated black people, preventing them from becoming all that they could become so that they lived as mere shells of what they could be (Biko 1987) leaving many experiencing shame and aspiring to inflict violence on fellow blacks (Fanon 1963). This is particularly important for South Africa, where issues of identity and diversity are so fraught with conflict. Online media may have the potential to bridge some of these divides. It also has the potential to extend historical separations associated with apartheid.

We should be careful not to present the view that everyone deems unpalatable and undesirable satirical material that deals with difficult topics in difficult ways. Indeed, it is noteworthy that not all the YouTube commentary thought that *Jesus is a Shangaan* is offensive. Some commentators expressed the view that the satirist was exercising his right to freedom of expression. For example, C4 felt it was necessary to respond to critical commentators by saying:

> Ah, People JUST GET OVER YOURSELVES! Mdu is just utilising his talent which he was GIVEN by God. What happened to, 'Nobody can do against God's will' ?? The point im driving home here is, God wouldn't have given Mdu such a talent if it was against his will, SO WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE GOD'S CREATION??? @Mdu, this is FUNNY man, we always laugh at it in class, KEEP IT UP!!!

What is witty for one person is not humorous to another. In the case of satire, what amuses narrators and some audience members is often structurally painful for those who are intended as the butt of the joke.

In the increasingly globalised world, digital-internet information and communication technologies have ensured that we can no longer be sure who audience members are. We also tend to know less about the information context within which our messages are interpreted. After all, online content is networked, linked, tagged and generally bound up with other individually or group-produced content which may constitute vulgar, derogatory and generally offensive but powerfully persuasive renditions of media messages (Hargrave & Livingstone 2009: 162-170). The repercussion is that communication acts intended to be satirical which are aired online are received by audiences that are "less finite, less predictable, less knowable" and communication and media scholars are duty bound to develop new ethics of humorous communication for the digital world (Lewis 2011: 227). A particular implication is that in today's world of viral and digital interconnectedness we must rethink what it means to tell ethnic jokes as these may now be received by a wide variety of others who do not share the same interpretive reference systems.

This article is based on Ubuntuism as a "philosophy" of politeness and conformity. As have been alluded to above, it would be more beneficial to impose a structure such as the difference between satire and choral poetry; or to even (at a stretch) consider pre-modernity, modernity and postmodernity as an analytical frame. As it stands, the argument remains a discussion of sentiments; a triumph of morality over ethics. There is no intellectual rigour.

DISCUSSION (CONSIDERING UBUNTU FOR SATIRE)

If tribal identities and representations are myths which have consequences, how does one satirise about them? How does one make a joke of something which makes a joke of the people it is directed at? How may storytellers tell stories that go beyond the historically informed and linguistically constrained universes in which imagination takes place? For example, as shown in Giliomee's (1989) or Butler's (1989) histories of the formation of Afrikaner ethnic/racial identity, how may South Africans realise that racism is another term for an unjust discrimination whose other forms are seen in ethnic and tribal bias? What does Ubuntu say about how satire may be performed in ways that ensure that tribalism and racism subside and draw to an end?

As South Africa strives to achieve development, clumsy communication on problems such as those of tribalism will not elegantly enable the country to deal with complex forms of othering. Enabling people to gain and use freedom of expression is a well-researched way to ensure that development can be achieved. Freedom of expression will enable the flourishing of thought-provoking media content that sparks debate among otherwise diverse and divergent people and challenges their beliefs, views and ideals in ways that are conducive to the articulation of complex, open and sustainable democratic statehood. Satirical media content is a powerful tool for this.

Satire as an ever-shifting and negotiated discursive practice is chosen and acted out by human agents. It requires constant ratification, redefinition and "taking-up" by satirists, audiences and targets who must take risks to manage their situations, knowing that satire may misfire and relationships may be both destabilised and reformed

(Simpson 2003: 8). An initial point to note is that the setting of satire assumes a relational perspective in which individuals are fundamentally in society and their value and worth, or at least the pleasures and harms that may be served to them are produced by and in social relations. Satire hence provides valuable new insight into the isiZulu aphorism, much understood as summarising the idea of Ubuntu, which says *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person with others).

Finding that satire locates people in relations is not strange. On the one hand, it simply reveals the *a priori* fact that satire is a form of communication and communication does involve practices, by which individuals are related one with another. On the other hand, the Ubuntu aphorism, "a person is a person with others" connotes that *how* people are enabled to participate in society matters (Chasi 2014a: 301). If we wish to understand what Ubuntu may contribute towards articulation of a desirable approach to online satire there should be every attempt to increase the extent to which individuals are granted the right to free speech, and individual participation in matters of concern should be secured. There is no evidence that Africans have historically done anything but value freedom of expression (Seleoane 2001; Chasi 2014b).

The authors are of the view that Ubuntu does not prescribe limiting the production of satire, but that it rather encourages the production of satire that enhances social welfare. This view is echoed in a comment, C5, which responds to *Jesus is a Shangaan* by saying:

> Nt [sic] funny, improve [sic] your work man. Think of how the audience will receive your work before you publish it. Dont [sic] be like a Dj [sic] who's playing himself instead of the crowd.

The authors believe it is possible to present satire that enables everyone to be the most they can be. Satire admittedly is violent, as is all other human communication (Sonderling 2013). This is why for one to be called an artist of satire requires exercising fine skill and judgement. Accordingly, in this article it is postulated that those who perform satire badly so that it carelessly misfires should be encouraged to improve their skills. Censorship does not teach people to improve their skills. Rather, enabling people to practise their skills as satirists better enables them to use this important tool for vital tasks, such as making people laugh and upbraiding authoritarians. If we fail to do this, we may end up with societies in which proverbial elephants in the room may remain undisclosed and undiscussed, with horrid consequences.

Digital online offers grand possibilities for Africans in many states to challenge tribalistic and "war of civilisations" ideas that pit imagined ethnic communities against one another in ways that ironically perpetuate neo-colonial arrangements, apartheid separations, authoritarian rule and underdevelopment. Investment in the creativity by which satirists and others can learn and apply excellence of the arts of communication to the work of breaking down undesirable orders is vital for African development.

Nineteenth-century existentialist Søren Kierkegaard (1940) decried that modernity, driven by the advent of the modern printing press, was levelling all people in the mocking satire of newspapers which were newly available in large numbers. In the

twentieth century, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998) observed that television was lowering standards of public communication. The hope remains that in the twenty-first century people can refuse to give in to the despairing thought that global digital-internet interconnectedness dooms weak Africans to becoming the eternal butt of harmful satire from global centres. With creativity, globalisation, which is in part enabled by digital-online technologies, can be used to ensure that in this era more than any other in human history, we can ensure that the metaphorical "floweriness of the different flowers [of humanity] is expressed in their very diversity", so that different flowering peoples communicate to cross-fertilise one another in ways that make best use of the fact that each human being contains "in themselves the seeds of a new tomorrow" (Thiong'o 1993).

This vision demands further articulation of Ubuntu which meets big new global challenges by embracing the fact of global humanity in ways that "re-member" and "en-courage" (take *into* heart) a most altruistic sense of the African *summum bonum* of social solidarity expressed in the view that "persons are persons with other persons". Such Ubuntu will surely embrace satire.

Increasingly, Africans, as with other people in the world, engage others in online settings. As we do so, it is necessary for us to think carefully about the implications of not reimaging how tribal identities and representations have been constructed and overdetermined by colonial and apartheid practices. This is particularly so because online communication tends to promote and enable more extreme expressions to flourish.

Satire is a powerful approach to communication. Africans can use the sharpness of satire in order to carve out new pathways to democracy and prosperity, just as they can use its bluntness to push back against authoritarian tendencies. The possibilities of using satire are many and varied and it is in the interests of Africans to think of the best ways of using satire and/or accommodating it in everyday life, particularly as the advent of digital-internet interconnectedness ensures that satire comes from or reaches unintended audiences and/or hits unintended targets. In this context, it is important to think about how the African moral philosophy of Ubuntu should direct how, why and to what end Africans should communicate using satire.

CONCLUSION: FOR UBUNTU IN SATIRICAL (ONLINE) COMMUNICATION

Although the authors are of the opinion that online satirical communication and reactions to it should not be silenced, they are also conscious of the fact that in online settings the temptation will be for more harmful forms of such communication to flourish as social limits are loosened. The challenge is to find ways to increase people's awareness of the need to use online spaces in ways that best reflect their aspirations for forms of community life that enable individuals to flourish in harmonious societies characterised by the recognition of shared humanity. Thinking about the possibilities of translating Ubuntu into an ethic that champions better online communication appears worthwhile in this context.

There is a need for scholars to elaborate more systematically and adequately what Ubuntu requires of (online) communication – how African excellence in communication can be understood when that communication is satirical. Further work in this area is important, particularly given, as shown in this article, that tribalism, for example, thrives in conditions in which satire is poorly developed. One can imagine an African future in which satire is embraced to advance the establishment of forms of community that best enable individuals to be the best they can be.

One line of future studies could consider adapting how the philosophy of Ubuntu is thought to value humans for their capacity to have relations of solidarity and shared identity with other "normal humans" (Metz 2007; 2012). Such work should be challenged to advance new conceptual insights regarding how Ubuntu can encourage relations of solidarity and shared humanity of identity, even with satirists who seek to improve humanity with their offensiveness. This challenge is particularly difficult to meet where satirists are digitally separated from those with whom they commune/communicate. From the viewpoint of Ubuntu, which was developed in close-knit communal societies, digital-online satirical communication arguably requires nuanced re-conceptualisation to ensure its continued relevance.

Given that we do not have perfect insight into other people's motives for actions, the pursuit of such a new approach to Ubuntu may yield highly attractive philosophical foundations for making moral judgements that have consequences for cooperative (online) communicative actions by which democracy can be advanced. There is great, honest attractiveness and promise for scholarship on Ubuntu that does not involve asking people to make judgements about the motives of others that are fundamentally opaque.

Finally, in the last paragraph of this article which references *Jesus is a Shangaan,* it is irresistible to observe that Ubuntu has been read by Bamford (2007) as having surprisingly broad, shared values and concerns with those articulated by Nietzsche. Those interested in pursuing Bamford's line of argument may find exploring Nietzsche's satirical *The Anti-Christ* (2007) most fascinating for the ways in which they urge people to be original and hence dangerous to tradition – in a manner that Nietzsche thinks makes Jesus great in contra-distinction to those who make his life and lessons into mere doctrine and dogma. One may suggest that, consistent with the above-noted Nietzchean line, the article has presented the beginning of a critique of discipleship of Ubuntu that does not threaten tradition by seeking to reinvent moral value systems for current and future needs. The authors think that in new online worlds, old moral philosophies such as Ubuntu should be re-invented.

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